

The light artillery, the lancers of General Alphonse Colbert, and of the intrepid Colonel Sourd, hung close upon their rear even to the entrance of the forest of Soignies, where the Duke of Wellington took up his position.

The other, 36,000 strong, was detached under the orders of Marshal Grouchy to observe and pursue the Prussians. It did not proceed beyond Gembloux.

The night of the 17th was dreadful, and seemed to presage the calamities of the day. A violent and incessant rain did not allow the army to take a single moment's rest. To increase our misfortunes, the bad state of the roads retarded the arrival of our provisions, and most of the soldiers were without food: however, they endured this double ill luck with much cheerfulness, and at daybreak announced to Napoleon by repeated acclamations that they were ready to fly to a fresh victory.

The Emperor had thought that Lord Wellington, separated from the Prussians, and foreseeing the march of General Grouchy, who on passing the Dyle might fall on his flank or on his rear, would not venture to maintain his position, but would retire to Brussels. He was surprised when daylight discovered to him that the English army had not quitted its positions, and appeared disposed to accept battle and await the attack. Several general officers were directed to reconnoitre their positions; and to use the words of one of them, he learned that they were defended by "an army of cannons, and mountains of infantry."

Napoleon immediately sent advice to Marshal Grouchy that he was probably about to engage in a grand battle with the English, and ordered him to push the Prussians briskly, to rejoin the Grand Army as speedily as possible, and to direct his movements so as to be able to connect his operations with it.

He then sent for his principal officers, to give them his instructions.

Some of them, confident and daring, asserted that the enemy's position should be attacked and carried by main force. Others, not less brave, but more prudent, urged that the ground being deluged by the rain, the troops, the cavalry in particular, could not manoeuvre without much difficulty and fatigue, that the English army would have the immense advantage of awaiting us on firm ground in its intrenchments, and that it would be better to endeavor to turn these. All did justice to the valor of our troops, and promised that they would perform prodigies; but they differed in opinion with regard to the resistance that the English would make. "Their cavalry," said the generals who had fought in Spain, "are not equal to ours; but their infantry are more formidable than is supposed. When intrenched they are dangerous from their skill in firing; in the open field they stand firm, and if broken, rally again within a hundred yards, and return to the charge." Fresh disputes arose, and, what is remarkable, it never entered into any one's head that the Prussians, pretty numerous parties of whom had been seen towards Moustier, might be in a situation to make a serious diversion on our right.